

Remarks to the International Olympic Committee in Copenhagen, Denmark
October 2, 2009

President Rogge, ladies and gentlemen of the International Olympic Committee: I come here today as a passionate supporter of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, as a strong believer in the movement they represent, and as a proud Chicagoan. But above all, I come as a faithful representative of the American people, and we look forward to welcoming the world to the shores of Lake Michigan and the heartland of our Nation in 2016.

To host athletes and visitors from every corner of the globe is a high honor and a great responsibility. And America is ready and eager to assume that sacred trust. We're a nation that has always opened its arms to the citizens of the world—including my own father from the African continent—people who have sought something better, who have dreamed of something bigger.

I know you face a difficult choice among several great cities and nations with impressive bids of their own. So I've come here today to urge you to choose Chicago for the same reason I chose Chicago nearly 25 years ago, the reason I fell in love with the city I still call home. And it's not just because it's where I met the woman you just heard from, although after getting to know her this week, I know you'll all agree that she's a pretty big selling point for the city.

You see, growing up, my family moved around a lot. I was born in Hawaii. I lived in Indonesia for a time. I never really had roots in any one place or culture or ethnic group. And then I came to Chicago. And on those Chicago streets, I worked alongside men and women who were black and white, Latino and Asian, people of every class and nationality and religion. I came to discover that Chicago is that most American of American cities, but one where citizens from more than 130 nations inhabit a rich tapestry of distinctive neighborhoods.

Each one of those neighborhoods—from Greektown to the Ukrainian Village, from Devon to Pilsen to Washington Park—has its own unique character, its own unique history, its songs, its language. But each is also part of our city—one city—a city where I finally found a home.

Chicago is a place where we strive to celebrate what makes us different, just as we celebrate what we have in common. It's a place where our unity is on colorful display at so many festivals and parades, and especially sporting events, where perfect strangers become fast friends just because they're wearing the same jersey. It's a city that works—from its first World's Fair more than a century ago to the World Cup we hosted in the nineties, we know how to put on big events. And scores of visitors and spectators will tell you that we do it well.

Chicago is a city where the practical and the inspirational exist in harmony, where visionaries who made no small plans rebuilt after a great fire and taught the world to reach new heights. It's a bustling metropolis with the warmth of a small town, where the world already comes together every day to live and work and reach for a dream, a dream that no matter who we are, where we come from, no matter what we look like or what hand life has dealt us, with hard work and discipline and dedication, we can make it if we try.

That's not just the American Dream; that is the Olympic spirit. It's the essence of the Olympic spirit. And that's why we see so much of ourselves in these games. That's why we want them in Chicago. That's why we want them in America.

Now, we stand at a moment in history when the fate of each nation is inextricably linked to the fate of all nations, a time of common challenges that require common effort. And I ran for

President because I believed deeply that at this defining moment, the United States of America has a responsibility to help in that effort, to forge new partnerships with the nations and the peoples of the world.

And no one expects the games to solve all our collective challenges. But what we do believe, what each and every one of you believe and what all of the Chicago delegation believes, is that in a world where we've all too often witnessed the darker aspects of our humanity, peaceful competition between nations represents what's best about our humanity. It brings us together, if only for a few weeks, face to face. It helps us understand one another just a little bit better. It reminds us that no matter how or where we differ, we all seek our own measure of happiness and fulfillment and pride in what we do. That's a very powerful starting point for progress.

Nearly 1 year ago, on a clear November night, people from every corner of the world gathered in the city of Chicago or in front of their televisions to watch the results of the U.S. Presidential election. Their interest wasn't about me as an individual, rather, it was rooted in the belief that America's experiment in democracy still speaks to a set of universal aspirations and ideals. Their interest sprung from the hope that in this ever-shrinking world, our diversity could be a source of strength, a cause for celebration; and that with sustained work and determination, we could learn to live and prosper together during the fleeting moment we share on this Earth.

Now, that work is far from over, but it has begun in earnest. And while we do not know what the next few years will bring, there is nothing I would like more than to step just a few blocks from my family's home, with Michelle and our two girls, and welcome the world back into our neighborhood.

At the beginning of this new century, the Nation that has been shaped by people from around the world wants a chance to inspire it once more: to ignite the spirit of possibility at the heart of the Olympic and Paralympic movement in a new generation; to offer a stage worthy of the extraordinary talent and dynamism offered by nations joined together; to host games that unite us in noble competition and shared celebration of our limitless potential as a people.

And so I urge you to choose Chicago; I urge you to choose America. And if you do, if we walk this path together, then I promise you this: The city of Chicago and the United States of America will make the world proud. Thank you so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:27 a.m. in the Bella Center. In his remarks, he referred to Jacques Rogge, president, International Olympic Committee. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

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